

The Philistine City-states

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The Background

Towards the end of the Late Bronze Age, Palestine was divided into a number of city-states which, in various circumstances and with some breaks and changes, had existed throughout the Bronze Age (Strange, *supra* 67-76). We are wellinformed about their size and distribution from the Amarna letters from the middle of the 14th century B.C. (Finkelstein [1996]). Palestine was then divided into 14 city-states with a three-level system of cities, towns and villages. The territory of the states ranged between 2500 km² (Hazor) and 550 km² (Shimron near Megiddo) depending chiefly on the terrain and economic possibilities. Palestine had come under Egyptian rule when Tutmosis III conquered it in a campaign during which he got as far as Northern Syria. This happened at the beginning of the Late Bronze Age and, according to the low chronology, in the year 1457 (cf. Kitchen [1987]). Egyptian domination was strengthened in the Ramesside period in the 13th century B.C., when Sety I and Ramesses II, after a number of military campaigns, reorganized the province and reasserted Egyptian domination by a military occupation, further buttressed by Merenptah and Ramesses III (Singer [1988]; [1994] 294).

The economic base of Palestine, however, eroded slowly during the Late Bronze Age due to factors not yet fully understood (Strange [1987] 1-15), but somehow a climatic change must have played a large role (Strange [forthcoming a]). The result was famine (Singer [1994] 291). Another strain on the economy was the repeated wars between the Hittite empire and Egypt (for the history of the period, see Redford [1992] 148-91).

After 1200 B.C. the Late Bronze Age culture collapsed and Palestine entered another intermediate period much like the Interval between the Early and Middle Bronze Age and the Interval between the Middle and Late Bronze Age. This Interval between the Bronze Age and the Iron Age (called the Iron I Period) ended in the Iron Age with the emergence of the kingdoms of Israel in the north – centered around Tirza and later Samaria – and Judah in the south –

centered around Jerusalem in the late 10th or early 9th century B.C. (Strange [forthcoming b]).

In this Intermediate period Palestine was roughly divided into three zones, each with its own settlement pattern. The mountainous zones in the northern and central mountain range were occupied by a number of Iron Age villages with a subsistence economy based on dry farming and pastoralism (Finkelstein [1995], Strange [forthcoming b]). In the Jizre'el-valley and the northern part of the Jordan valley, and around Lake Tiberias, a number of city-states had survived from the Bronze Age, *viz.*, Megiddo (Singer [1994] 286), Ta'anak, and to the east Kinneret and Tell Hadar (Volkmar Fritz, orally), Beth Shan in the Jordan valley (still with a partly Egyptian population), and further to the south Tell Saidiyeh and Tell Mazar (Strange [forthcoming a]). They were probably still under Egyptian rule at the beginning of this period, and they were strategically placed on the trade route between the Eastern Mediterranean coast and the lands east of the River Jordan. Thirdly, in the west, on the coastal plain, lay the Philistine city-states.

The Epigraphic and Literary Evidence

These states arose in the aftermath of the invasions of the Sea Peoples in the years 1218 in the reign of Merenptah, and 1180 and 1177 in the reign of Ramesses III, again according to the low chronology.

The Sea Peoples consisted of elements from several different "tribes" or "peoples", as may be seen from the reliefs at the mortuary temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu (Medinet Habu I-III; Yadin [1963] 332-345; Dothan [1982] 5-10): the Lukku, the Sherden, the Tursha, the Philistines, the Tjekker, the Shekelesh, the Denyen and the Weshesh (Strange [1980] 138-142, 157-186). There is today agreement that the Sea Peoples came from the Balkans and the Aegean world, with Cyprus as the last stop on the way before the invasion into the Levant.¹ In the Bible it is stated that they came from Caphtor (Gen. 10,13f; Amos 9,7; Jer. 47,4); the identification of this place is probably Cyprus but possibly Crete (Strange [1980]; see most

recently Quack [1997]). This place was a station on their route to the Levant, and does not tell us anything about the ultimate origin of the Sea Peoples. Possibly they came from several different regions, like the Germanic peoples of the great migration at the end of the Classical period (see e.g. Sandars [1978] 157-177; Strange [1980] 157-60).

Three of these “peoples” were settled after their defeat on the coastal plain of Palestine and are attested there around 1100 B.C.: the Sherden, the Tjekker and the Philistines; probably the Philistines were to the south, the Tjekker in the middle and the Sherden in the north (Onomasticon of Amenope, see Gardiner [1947] I 194*-205*; Strange [1980] 159). The sequence from south to north is corroborated partly by the Bible – where the name Philistines seems to denote all three groups settled on the coastal plain – and partly by the Wen Amon Report from the time of Ramesses XI – where Tjekker are mentioned at Dor,² while the Sherden seem to be settled on the plain of Akko (Singer [1994] 297-98).

The “Philistine” territory proper reached from Gaza (Tell Ghazze, Palestine Grid 099101) in the south to Ekron (Khirbet el Muqanna/Tel Miqne, PG 136131) and Ashdod (Tell Isdud, PG 117129) in the north. But apparently Philistines lived as far south as Gerar (Tell Abu Hureire/Tel Haror, PG 112087), Gen. 26,1, and Siqlag (Tell el-Shari`a/Tel Sera`, PG 119088), 1. Sam. 27,5-7; and as far north as Aphek (Ras el-Ain/Tel Aphek, PG 143168), 1. Sam. 4,1; 29,1; 2. Kings 13,22 (LXX), and Tell Qasile (PG 130169) where an important Philistine temple was found (Dothan, Dunayevsky and Mazar [1993] 1204-5, 1207-10; Mazar [1980-5]). The eastern border of the territory was Gath (Tell el-Safi/Tel Zafit, PG 135123) or even Azeqa (Khirbet Tell Zakariyeh, PG 144123), 1. Sam. 17,1.³

The presence of the Philistines in this area, and only in this area, may be deduced from a combination of written and material evidence. As mentioned above the Philistines were settled there according to the Onomasticon of Amenope, and they are mentioned in the Old Testament. Here they are described as living in a confederation of city-states in this area, their main cities being Gaza (Tell Ghazze, PG 099101), Ashdod (Tell Isdud, PG 117129), Ashkelon (Asqalan, PG 107119), Gath (Tell el-Safi),⁴ and Ekron (Khirbet el-Muqanna/Tel Miqne, PG 136131, e.g. Joshua 13,3; 1. Sam. 6,17f.). They tried to gain a foothold in the mountains (1. Sam. 4; 13; 17; 28; 31) but were finally checked by David (2. Sam. 8,1). Even if these texts are 500-600 years later than the events they describe, they probably reflect reliable traditions.

The Philistines continued to live on the coastal plain as may be seen from the oracles of prophets from the 7th and 6th century B.C. (Am. 1,6-8; Jer. 47; Seph. 2,4-7).

The country Pilishta is mentioned in the Assyrian archives when the area was incorporated in the Assyrian empire under Sargon II in 713 B.C. (Stone [1995] 19f). It is noteworthy that a newly found inscription from Ekron mentions “Ikausu, son of Padi”, names known from the Assyrian archives as royal Philistine names.⁵ Later the name Philistine is connected with the area and developed into the Greek-Roman name Palestine.

In the Bible we perhaps have an indication of a separate language of the Philistines in the word “seranim”, the word for the rulers of the five Philistine cities (e.g. Joshua 13,3; Judges 16,5; 1. Sam. 5,8; 29,2). This word has been compared to Greek “tyrannos” (supposedly a Lydian word) or Hieroglyph-Hittite “sarauanas” or “TRW-na-s”; it is certainly not a Semitic word (Strange [1980] 133f); also the name Akish/Ikausu is probably a Philistine and not a Semitic name (Gittin [1998] 173f).

The Material Remains

The oldest material remains from the Philistines was found in Ekron. A new city was built directly on top of the remains of the Bronze Age city, and the finds contain a large amount of a locally produced Myc. IIIc:1b pottery.⁶ This monochrome ware is a direct descendant of Mycenaean pottery with the closest parallels in Cyprus (Caphtor/Keftiu, Strange [1980]) and Cilicia. Above, in the following layer, this pottery is replaced by the true “Philistine” pottery. This is a type of pottery with forms derived from Mycenaean, Cypriot, Egyptian and Palestinian forms, mostly with a white slip or rather wash, and a bichrome decoration with Mycenaean, Egyptian and Palestinian motifs, being a separate class of Sub-Mycenaean pottery (Myc. III:C 1 c) with Levantine and Palestinian features (Desborough [1964] 209-14; Dothan [1982] 94-218). The pottery has been found over a wide area: as far to the south-east as Tell Masos, South-east of Be’ersheba; as far north as Tell Dan (Tell el-Qadi); as far east as Tell Deir Allah, east of the Jordan river; and as far north-east as Tell el-Fukhar, east of Irbid on the northern plateau (Strange [1997a] 405; McGovern [1997] 424). This spread, however, is due to trade and does not reflect Philistine settlements outside the core area. Among the plain wares, a special type of cooking pot was found, which is not derived from the

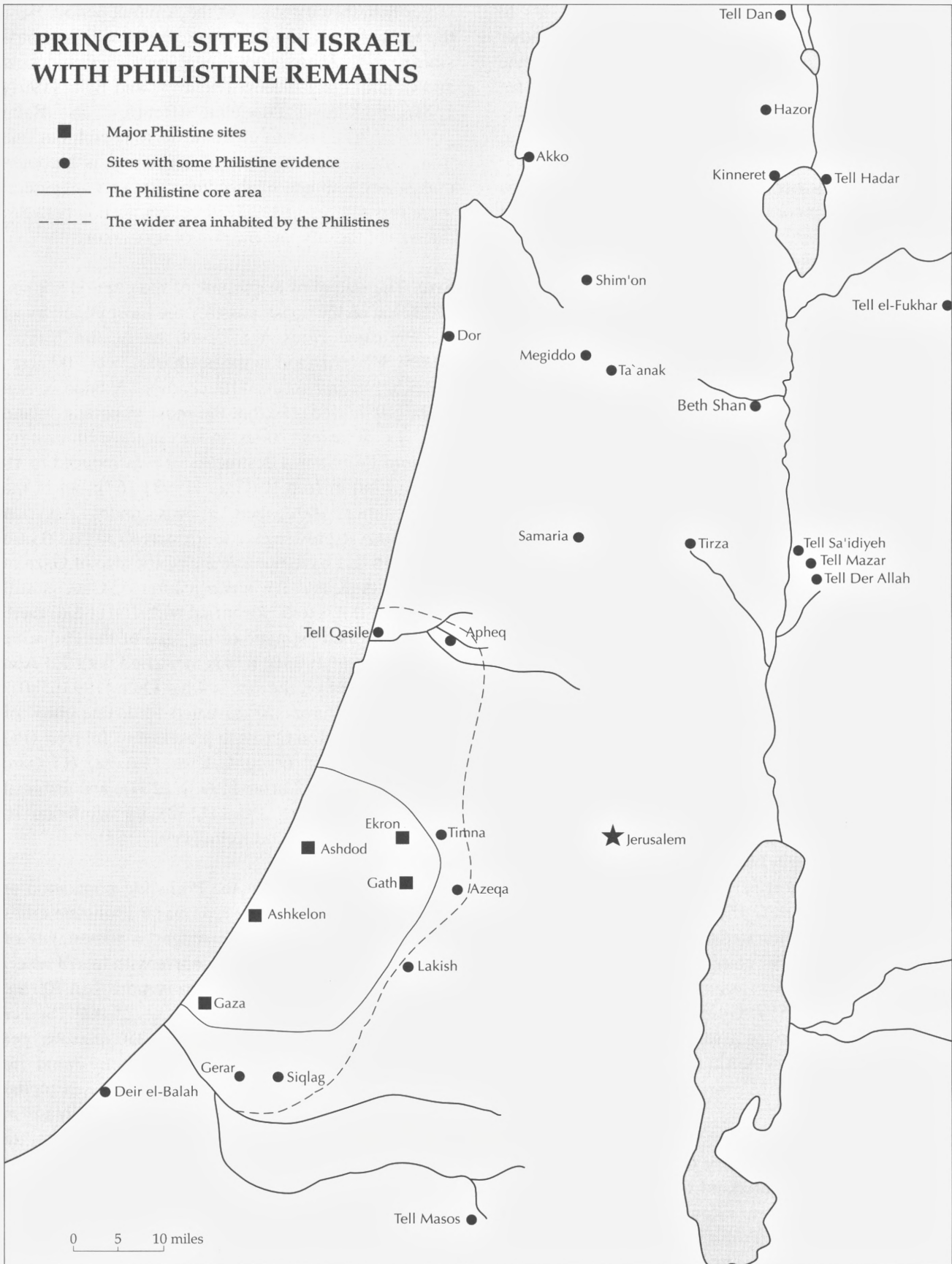


Fig. 1. Map of Israel.

usual Palestinian repertoire, and possibly points to a foreign “cuisine”. It has been questioned whether the “Philistine” pottery was really made by the Philistines, not the least because there is a time lag from the Sea Peoples’ invasion and settlement and the occurrence of the oldest “Philistine” pottery (see e.g. Desborough [1964] 209-14). This is an example of the problem of whether ethnicity can be traced in the archaeological record. In this case, however, I feel confident that there is a connection, because we have a link with contemporary texts; they testify to a peculiar culture and a political state formation over a period of 500 years, as well as a material culture in the same area which can be shown to consist of several elements all pointing the same way. The accumulated evidence of literary sources and material remains seems decisive (Stone [1995]; Strange [1998b] 47f).

Other classes of artifacts and architectural characteristics may also with some certainty be classified as Philistine (cf. Stone [1995] 17-19). The most important architectural evidence is a palace found at Ekron from the 12th century B.C. with a hearth of the same type as in the Aegean palaces, and not found outside the Philistine area.⁷ Next, there are graves (Waldbaum [1966]; Dothan [1982] 252-88); cultic objects;⁸ ivories;⁹ and possibly bronzework (Dothan and Dothan [1992] 248-51). A note of warning must be sounded concerning the anthropoid clay sarcophagi which have been used uncritically to identify Sea Peoples all over the southern Levant; the sarcophagi are Egyptian, but perhaps some of them, especially from Deir el-Balah and Beth Shan, may, because of their distinctive decoration on the headband, be assigned to Sea-Peoples/Philistines (Dothan [1979] 98-104; McGovern [1994] 146-49; Noort [1994] 128-33).

After a rather short period, probably no more than one or two centuries, the material culture of the Philistines was acculturated to the Palestinian material culture; but they never completely lost their “cultural core” nor were they assimilated into Palestinian society (Stone [1995] 7; Gitin [1967]). Thus there is a distinct regional pottery assemblage in the Philistine area in the 7th century (Gitin [1998] 167).

The City-States

Territory. The core territory occupied by the Philistine cities and their hinterland was 50 km long and 20 km wide, or ca. 1000 km² (Stager [1995] 342); and the area inhabited by the Philistines was altogether 100 km long and 20-40 km wide, or ca. 3500 km² (cf. map in Stager [1995] 336); thus it was not very much

larger than the city-states of the Amarna period. How the territory was divided among the cities is not possible to state. There is not enough published evidence, and Central Place Theory (Renfrew and Bahn [1991] 158f) or XTENT Modeling (Renfrew and Bahn [1991] 159f) do not to my mind seem useful. For one thing, the nature of some of the cities as harbours makes any estimate of their territory very uncertain: there is not necessarily any direct connection between the size of the city and the size of its territory.

Size. The size of at least some of the cities is known. Ashkelon on the coast, possibly the most important of the Philistine cities, was 50-60 ha in size (Stager [1995] 346); Ashdod to the north of it, was 100 acres (40.5 ha) in size in the 11th century (Ashdod X, see Gitin [1998] 165); Ekron, the most important inland city, was 50 acres (20 ha) in size in the 11th century (stratum IV); after a destruction it was reduced to 10 acres (4 ha) in Iron II (Gitin [1998] 167); but in the period after 700 when it was under Assyrian dominance it grew again to 75 acres (30 ha) (Gitin [1998] 167). I have no estimate of the size of Gaza in the Iron Age, and the identification of Gath is still uncertain. If it is to be identified with Tell el-Safi there is no published estimate of the size of the Philistine city (cf. Stern [1993]); if it is identified with Tel Abu Hureire/Tel Haror, the size is 4 ha (Oren [1993] 580).

Other tells have also revealed Philistine cities of some size, e.g. Tell Qasile in present day Tel Aviv (PG 139167), its size being 4 acres (1.6 ha) (Dothan, Dunayevsky and Mazar [1993] 1204), and Biblical Timnah (Tell Batash, PG 141132), its size being 10 acres (4 ha) (Mazar and Kelm [1993] 152).

Population. As most of the Philistine population at the beginning lived in the five major Philistine cities (see below), it is possible to suggest a guesstimate of the size of the population, of course with lots of reservations. As the total built-up area is more than 100 ha, the number may be calculated at 25,000 (Stager [1995] 344), based on a rate of 250 persons per hectare (Stager [1985]). There is to my mind no reason to assume that this number increased in the cities over the following centuries. Any increase in the population would rather have occurred in satellite cities or in the countryside.

Ethnic and political identity. Although the Philistines underwent a process of acculturation over the period from their settlement to the Babylonian and Persian conquests, it seems that they managed to

retain their identity through the whole period (Stone [1995]; Gitin [1998]).

Admittedly, the Philistine cities were destroyed by the Babylonians and their inhabitants deported to Babylon, but in spite of the fact that the Philistines more or less disappeared from the records (Gitin [1998] 163), it is worth remembering that the name of the region is still attested in the writings of Herodotus (Lemche [1996] 96f), and through the Hellenistic and Roman-Byzantine periods the name was extended to cover all of Palestine, both east and west of the river Jordan (Avi-Yonah [1966] 118-125 with map).

A case may also be made for the cultural separateness of the cities on the southern Levantine coast in later Classical periods. Thus their mention in Stephanus of Byzantium and the coins point to close ties with Greece (Strange [1980] 122f); and Athenaios tells us that Atargatis and her son Ichthys were connected with Ashkelon (Strange [1980] 134). Ichthys is the Greek name for the Philistine god Dagon, which is usually derived from the Semitic word for "grain", but if 1 Sam. 5,4 is to be taken seriously, he was in fact a fish god, and his name is derived from the Semitic "dag" = fish (cf. Holter [1989]). It must be kept in mind that much of this may be late speculations and myth-making.

In this connection, however, the question must be asked, how great a proportion of the inhabitants in the Philistine area were Philistine immigrants or their descendants, and how great a proportion were indigenous Canaanites.¹⁰ That the Philistines were a minority is indicated by the fact that they were settled as "mamluks" by Ramesses III to control the area and preserve it as an Egyptian province (cf. below). It is inconceivable that the Philistines, while destroying the cities, also killed all the inhabitants in the area in order to create an empty land to settle. On the other hand, it cannot be precluded that many of the inhabitants on the coastal plain fled to the mountains, which were already populated. The Philistines were probably a minority but they constituted the elite and kept this position. The rather rapid acculturation can be explained by the assumption that a number of the indigenous population were admitted into this elite over the centuries.

Settlement pattern. Philistia seems to be settled in a three layer system. Of the first rank were the five Philistine cities, the capitals of the Philistine city-states. Of the second rank were a number of cities dependent on one of the 5 cities, such as Timnah/Tell Batash (PG 141132), a daughter city to Ekron (Gitin

[1998] 165), or Tell Qasile, probably a daughter city to Ashdod (or Dor), or Gerar/Tell Abu Hureire, probably a daughter city to Gaza. And of the third rank a number of unfortified villages must have existed, at least in the greater part of the period of the city-states. This pattern may perhaps be corroborated by a list of towns and villages from the 7th century from neighbouring Judah, showing Judah being divided into a number of districts with cities and their villages and hamlets (Joshua 15,20-62;18,21-28;19,40-46, cf. map in Strange [1998] 40). At least the districts in the foothills close to the territory of the Philistine cities would supposedly have the same settlement pattern as these.

Citizenship. There is no information on citizenship in the technical political sense in the Philistine cities; the notion of citizenship is not relevant in their case, and the concept was developed later. In the Ancient Near East citizenship was little more than birth or residence in a particular place, with certain privileges possessed by freeborns as against slaves (cf. Bruce [1992]). On the other hand, I suppose that there was a clear distinction between the Philistines and the rest of the population in the cities, as we see it in other countries in the Near East. In Israel, for example, the status of "ger" (Greek *paroikos*) or "sojourner" was an acknowledged concept, and is attested in accounts like the patriarchal stories (e.g. Gen. 12,10; 23,4; 26,3,11) (Spencer [1992]).

Urbanization. The Philistine civilization seems to have been an urban civilization from the beginning. This may be inferred from the texts of Ramesses III in which he maintains that he himself settled them: "I settled them in fortresses confined through my name. Their draftees were numerous, approaching hundreds of thousands, and I supplied them all by tax with clothing and provisions reckoned against the treasury, the granaries each year" (Papyrus Harris 76;8-9, here quoted from Redford [1992] 289; see, however, Bietak [1993] 300). The archaeological evidence from e.g. Ashdod and Ekron points to a destruction of the former Canaanite city, with a subsequent foundation of a Philistine city without any break. Archaeological surveys have revealed few Iron Age settlements in the countryside, from which it may be inferred that most of the Philistines, at least in the early stage of the occupation of the coastal plain, lived in the five major cities (Stager [1995] 344). Later, of course, there must have been rural settlements, as the Philistine economy in later periods to a large extent was based on export of agricultural products (see below).

Those Philistine cities which have been excavated (Ashkelon, Ashdod and Ekron) reveal that the cities were divided into zones, an indication of urban planning, probably adopted from abroad (Stager [1995] 345). This is best observed in Ekron, which had fortifications, and distinct elite, industrial and domestic zones (Gitin [1998] 167-68 with a map of the city). Ashdod too had a town plan (Dothan and Porath [1993] 12-13, 70-73; Stager [1995] 346).

Economy. Only in Ekron are we well informed about the economy, but only at a late stage in the history of the city-state. After becoming a Neo-Assyrian vassal the city was dominated by an industrial zone which formed a belt of tripartite factory buildings along the interior face of the city wall. The installations were for manufacturing olive-oil, and they consisted of a crushing basin, a cylindrical stone roller, pressing vats and pressing weights. So far 115 installations have been found with a total capacity of 500 tons, making Ekron the largest excavated center for the production of olive oil (Gitin [1998] 167-73). After ca. 630 there is a decline in the number of installations, marking a decrease in production after the end of Assyrian rule (*ibid* 173). The explanation is certainly that olive oil was a “cash crop” meant for Assyria, cf. the Phoenician cities as suppliers of raw materials (Niemeyer, *supra* 102-3; Frankenstein [1979] 269-73).

The Philistine city-states must have supplemented their economy with trade, at least in the case of Gaza and Ashkelon, both lying on the coast. Gaza was the entrepôt for the Arabian trade (cf. above) and the Tjekker built a harbour at Dor (Singer [1994] 296; Stern [1998] 346). At the same time the Philistines controlled a part of the trunk road between Egypt and Assyria, which gave them a key position in the trade between Egypt and Mesopotamia.

There must have been an agricultural basis for the economy. The area is well suited for cereals (Stager [1995] 345), and there is evidence of animal husbandry, sheep and goats, but especially cattle and swine (Stager [1995] 344). There is a marked contrast between the highlands in the early period of the Philistine settlement, the Iron I period (or rather the Intermediate Bronze/Iron Age, cf. above). In the highlands there are scarcely any bones to be found, while there is an enormous increase in the Philistine area; this is highly suggestive, in view of the Israelite taboo on pigs, while the Mycenaeans and the Greek had a positive attitude towards pork (Stager [1995] 344); but of course the difference may be due to sociological factors. The sheep were probably the basis

for a weaving industry possibly found at Ashkelon (Stager [1995] 346)

There is also some sign of viticulture: in Ashkelon a royal winery from the 7th century was found, and it is worth remembering that the Philistines introduced the krater to the Levant (Stager [1995] 345).

Payments were made in bullion silver, as may be seen from the caches of precious metals and jewelry found at Ekron (Gitin [1998] 175f; Golani and Sass [1998] 58-62).

Religion. When they settled down in the Levant the Philistines brought their earlier religion with them. This may be deduced from the large number of Aegean-type idols and Psi- and Phi-idols (cf. above) as well as other cultic vessels e.g. rhyta and ring-kernoi (Dothan [1982] 219-251). The temples at Tell Qasile (Mazar [1980-85]) show an affinity with Aegean-Cypriot temples (Dothan [1982] 251); and the building with a hearth at Ekron (see above) points the same way. Also the Philistine cult of the dead may indicate an Aegean background (Dothan [1982] 251-88), although doubt has been cast upon the nature of the anthropoid coffins as Philistine (Noort [1994] 128-33; Stager [1995] 341f; Strange [1998] 26, cf. above). And finally, as mentioned above, Dagon at Ashdod, possibly a fish-god, was thus not a Levantine concept of a god of a city.

But it is obvious that the Philistine religion later was much more akin to the usual Levantine religion. This was undoubtedly part of the acculturation process which the Philistines underwent in the course of the centuries (cf. Stone [1995] 21). This acculturation may be seen in Ekron in temple complex 650 from the Late-Assyrian period (dated i.a. by the inscription mentioned above with the names of five kings). The plan of the temple complex is on the design of Assyrian royal palaces (Gitin [1998] 173), and the finds from the rooms include a storejar with a dedicatory inscription “le-Asherat” – for Ashera, the Western Semitic mother goddess, the spouse of the head of the pantheon, El (Gitin [1998] 174 and 179 fig. 16); another with the inscription “lmqm” – for the shrine, a Semitic word and concept; also Egyptian artifacts like a gold ureaus and a Ptah-amulet must be mentioned (Gitin [1998] 174 and 178 fig. 14). In another place a silver cache contained a medallion with the goddess Ishtar standing on a lion (Gitin [1998] 175 and 180 fig. 18; Golani and Sass [1998] 70-72 with fig. 14,2), and a series of mould-made Asherah figurines found in the Philistine cities of a type different from the inland figurines from the same

period, but with affinities to Syria and Nippur also points to religious acculturation (Stone [1995] 21). 17 four-horned incense altars of limestone resemble the usual horned altars from the Levant (Gitin [1998] 173 and 176 fig 10; cf. Fowler [1992] 409).

From the Bible we learn that the Philistines in Ekron in the middle of the 9th century worshipped the Canaanite god Ba'al-Zebub, Lord of the Flies (2. Kings 1,2-17); although this name is very early, it is also attested in the Greek versions, and is probably a parody of a genuine Canaanite god's name, "Ba'al-Zebul", which means "Prince Ba'al" and is found already in the texts from Ugarit. It shows that the Philistines were prompt to acculturate themselves religiously to their Levantine surroundings (cf. Gray [1970] 463).

As regards the main god of Ashdod, Dagon, it is an open question whether he is the Western Asiatic god meaning grain, already known in the Ebla texts, or whether he is a fish god (cf. above).

This evidence is sufficient to show that the Philistines brought their indigenous religion with them when they migrated to the Levant, but that in this respect as well as in others they acculturated or perhaps even assimilated themselves to the religion of their new home.

Defence. A number of Philistine cities had massive city walls.

Ashdod had a strong Late Bronze Age fortress with a surrounding wall which was reused by the Philistines from the 12th century (Dothan [1993] 96f; Dothan [1971] 27-30 with plan 2), and a city wall (Dothan and Porath [1993] 12, 70-2 and plan 10f). From Iron Age II (ca. 1000-600 B.C.) a city wall with a city gate was found (Dothan [1993] 98f; Dothan and Dothan [1992] 183-85 with fig.).

Ashkelon had a city wall with a mudbrick glacis and a mudbrick tower (Stager [1993] 105-7 with plan and section).

Dor was fortified with walled ramparts and a glacis (Stager [1995] 338).

Ekron stratum VII, the Iron I city, was fortified with a 3.25 m thick mudbrick wall, in some places with offset platform and revetment (Dothan and Gitin [1993] 1053f). Later, when the lower town was abandoned, the upper city was fortified with a mudbrick city wall and mudbrick tower, faced with ashlar masonry (Gitin [1998] 167), and still later, when the city grew after 720, the city had a double stone wall system: an upper city wall on the crest of the slope and a lower wall at the base of the slope with stables

between them; also traces of a bastion were found. The city gate was a four-entryway type gate, with a tower, two piers and two cells on each side, like the gates in Lachish and Ashdod (Dothan and Gitin [1993] 1057).

Gerar/Tell Abu Hureire had a city wall with glacis and watchtowers founded on a Middle Bronze Age rampart (Oren [1993] 582f).

No evidence is available for Gaza and Gath (Tell es-Safi/Tel Zafit).

Summing up, the Philistine cities were all solidly fortified. There is also some evidence that the Philistines initially enjoyed superior knowledge of metal-working, which would again have given them a military advantage. This may be reflected in the account in 1. Sam. 17 of Goliath's fight with David where a detailed description of Goliath's armaments is given (Yadin [1963] 265, 354f; Bierling [1992] 147-50; Dothan [1982] 19f; Dothan [1992] 333). However, given that the story of Goliath is a late saga, it seems better to abstain from deducing anything certain from it.¹¹ On the other hand, we are well informed about the arms of the Philistines during their migrations from the reliefs from Medinet Habu (see conveniently Yadin [1963] 332-345; Dothan [1982] 5-10). In them the Philistines wear a short kilt and a ribbed corselet of leather or metal. They are armed with a small round shield, two spears and a large two-edged sword or dagger with a midrib (Dothan [1982] 5-14).

Government. In the Bible the Philistine cities seem to have been a confederation of five cities, each with a king as ruler. Their title is given only in the plural as "seranim" (cf. above), (e.g. Jos. 13,3; Judg. 3,3; 16,23; 1.Sam. 5,8; 29,2), called king in 1. Sam. 21,11.13. They seem to have acted together (Judg. 23,27): each individual king having to consider the opinion of the others (1. Sam. 29,2-11). The status of these "seranim" cannot be determined from the texts; there is no indication that they had a "gerousia" or the like, but it must be remembered that our knowledge is indirect, from the Bible. Why the Biblical texts call the rulers "seranim" may only be guessed at, but presumably it is to emphasize the "otherness" of the Philistines, just as the fact that they were uncircumcised is often mentioned. Later texts talk of a Philistine king in Gerar (Gen. 20,2; 26,1), but nothing may be deduced from them, as they otherwise seem to have a complete legendary character and could be from a much later period (Strange [1997b] 212).

The Assyrian texts from the 8th-7th century are

more trustworthy. They frequently mention the kings of the Philistine cities: Tiglat-Pileser III (744-727) mentions the kings Hanno of Gaza and Mitinti of Ashkelon (Pritchard [1955] 283). Sargon II (721-705) mentions Hanno, king of Gaza; Iamani (or: a Greek) of Ashdod; Azuri, king of Ashdod (Pritchard [1955] 284-87). Sennacherib (704-681) mentions Mitinti, king of Ashdod; Sidqia, king of Ashkelon; Padi, king of Ekron and Sillibel, king of Gaza (Pritchard [1955] 287f). And finally, Esarhaddon (680-669) mentions Sil-Bel, king of Gaza; Metinti, king of Ashkelon; Ikausu, king of Ekron (Pritchard [1955] 291). Although the names mentioned are so much alike that loans from earlier texts to later texts seems probable, the names as such seem authentic,¹² and establish the fact that, in the eyes of the Assyrian kings, the Philistine cities were ruled by kings.

It is noteworthy that Gath is no longer counted among the Philistine cities. It was apparently taken by Judah (Strange [1966] 128; Aharoni [1967] 314; Seger [1992] 909).

In Babylonian historical texts Nebuchadnezzar (605-562) mentions the king of Gaza and the king of Ashdod being at his court (Pritchard [1955] 308).

All these texts point to a monarchical government in the Philistine city-states. The Biblical texts may show that the early Philistines were a confederation where the “seranim” always acted together, while the later Assyrian texts show that by the 8th-7th century the Philistine area was turned into separate kingdoms with kings acting individually (Gitin [1998] 164).

A rank-size diagram supports the texts in indicating that the Philistine cities probably were of equal importance and that the five kings consequently were equal.

Self-government. The Philistines were almost certainly under Egyptian suzerainty at the beginning. As already mentioned, they were probably placed in the Levantine cities as “mamluks” or Egyptian governors over a Palestinian population. This seems to be supported by the evidence from Beth Shan, Tell Saidiyeh – both in the Jordan valley – and at Deir el-Balah.¹³ Ramesses III maintained that he himself settled them: “I settled them in fortresses confined through my name. Their draftees were numerous, approaching hundreds of thousands, and I supplied them all by tax with clothing and provisions (reckoned against the treasury, the granaries) each year” (Papyrus Harris 76:8-9, here quoted from Redford [1992] 289; cf. Stager [1995] 341). This situation did not last as the Egyptian control of Palestine was lost in the late XX Dynasty and the XXI Dynasty.

Although Egyptian objects from the period down to Ramesses VI are found in Palestine (Redford [1992] 290), it is clear that the Philistines were now independent and spread out into the countryside (Redford [1992] 290f), but they may still, nominally, have been under Egyptian suzerainty. Of course the Egyptian Pharaohs tried to reassert their power in the Levant. At least a raid under Pharaoh Siamun from the XXI Dynasty in the early 10th century (Kitchen [1973] 280-83) and the raid of Pharaoh Shoshenq (Biblical Shishaq 1. Kings 14,25f) from the XXII Dynasty in the late 10th century shortly after Solomon’s death (Kitchen [1973] 293-300) seem to imply an Egyptian reassertion of suzerainty over Palestine, perhaps after an erosion of earlier loyalty. It is noteworthy that the route which can be reconstructed from the Shishaq list at Karnak – naming more than 150 conquered cities – shows that the Shoshenq raid was directed mainly against Israel (the Northern Kingdom) and Judah (the Southern Kingdom) whereas the Philistine cities were spared. The reason may well have been that the Philistine cities had already acknowledged the Egyptian overlordship before the raid (for an analysis of the Shoshenq-list see Kitchen [1973] 432-447, for a convenient map see Strange [1998] 39).

Later in the Third Intermediate Period after 1000 B.C. (Kitchen [1973]), during the XXII to XXIII Dynasties, the Philistine cities were probably autonomous city-states, but the situation changed when the Assyrian empire under Tiglath-Pileser III conquered the Levant in the second half of the 8th century. In 738 a rebellion in North Syria led by Azriyau of Yaudi was subdued and the kings of Hamath, Damascus and Israel (the Northern Kingdom) were compelled to pay tribute (Pritchard [1955] 282f; Otzen [1979] 253). In 734 Tiglath-Pileser took Gaza, where the king, Hanun, had gone to Egypt to get help, and made the city into an Assyrian vassal. Hanun was reinstated on the throne (Pritchard [1955] 283f; Otzen [1979] 255f). This was probably because Gaza was the entrepôt for the Arabian trade, and the Assyrians wished to secure their commercial interests (Tadmor [1966] 87f; cf. later in the 5th century for the importance of Gaza, Strange [1980] 123). At the same time Tiglath-Pileser turned Ashkelon and Ashdod into Assyrian vassal states (Otzen [1979] 252). On the other hand, the area around Dor was made a province (Otzen [1979] 252.255), probably because it was part of the kingdom of Israel and had no king of its own who could serve as a vassal. Megiddo and Gilead suffered the same fate in the following year (Pritchard [1955] 283; Otzen [1979] 254). The king of Samaria

was replaced by a puppet king (Pritchard [1955] 284; Otzen [1979] 254). At the same time Damascus was made into a province (Otzen [1979] 254). After Tiglath-Pileser's death, a new rebellion broke out, and Sargon incorporated Israel as a province, while the Philistine cities, Judah with its capital Jerusalem, and the Transjordanian states Ammon, Moab and Edom all retained their status as vassal states (Pritchard [1955] 284f; Otzen [1979] 257). Further rebellions in 720, 713, 705-1 did not alter this arrangement; it seems that the Assyrians wanted the periphery to be governed as vassal states instead of provinces, somewhat like the Phoenician cities (Pritchard [1955] 286-88; Otzen [1979] 258). In the end Esarhaddon conquered Egypt in 671 (Pritchard [1955] 291-4), but it seems that the Philistine states even then retained their semi-independence. The final loss of self-government probably came with the Babylonian conquests in the west in 605 B.C. (cf. Otzen [1979] 258; Gitin [1998] 163).

Philistine state formation is a clear case of organization into separate city-states. It is an interesting case, because the Philistine cities existed for 550 years or more and went through three phases: first Egyptian overlordship, next independence, and lastly Assyrian overlordship. One question remains: was the formation of city-states an idea the Philistines brought with them from their homelands? Or was it an idea they adopted in their new home? In view of the chronology of the Greek city-states (Hansen, *infra* 145-8), and the fact that the city-state as a state form was known in the Levant from the beginning of Early Bronze I period around 3000 B.C. (Strange, *supra* 67-76) I find the latter alternative obvious. The city-state system in Palestine had collapsed over large parts of the country at the end of the Bronze Age, when the Egyptian overlordship broke down, but in the valleys to the north and on the coastal plain – where the Egyptians were still in control – the city-state system persevered. Although the cities in the coastal plain were apparently destroyed during the Philistine invasion, they were once again reconstructed as city-states, presumably with Egyptian help.

Notes

1. Strange (1980) 157-65; Dothan (1982) 21-23; Dothan and Dothan (1992) 191-98; Stone (1995) 17-19; Killebrew (1998).
2. See conveniently Hallo (1997) 90; Singer (1994) 295-97; Stern (1998).
3. The story of David and Goliath is certainly a late legend, cf. 2. Sam. 22,19, but the geographical setting is probably a true memory.

4. Tell es Safi or, according to Stager (1995) 343, Tell Abu Hureire PG 112087; however, in the light of e.g. 1. Sam. 5,8 this proposal seems to be too far to the south, and Tell Abu Hureire should rather be identified with Gerar, see Oren (1993) 580.
5. Gitin, Dothan and Naveh (1997) 1-16; Gitin (1998) 173f and 178 with fig. 13.
6. Dothan and Dothan (1992) 162-70; Killebrew (1998) 379-405; cf. for Ashdod Strange (1980) 164f; Dothan and Porath (1993) 12,172f with fig.14, pls. XII,XIII:1,2; and cf. for Ashkelon Stager (1993) 107; (1995) 334f.
7. Dothan and Dothan (1992) 242-245, a similar one was excavated at Tell Qasile in Tel Aviv.
8. E.g. psi- and phi-idols, ring-kernoi, bird-headed bowls, lion-headed rhyta and a figurine of a seated deity and throne from Ashdod which is a variant of the Mycenaean female figurine seated on a throne, most of it in white-washed ware with polychrome decoration (Dothan [1982] 219-251; Dothan and Dothan [1992] 153-57; Noort [1994] 134-37).
9. Dothan and Dothan (1992) 246 and plate 30, showing and iron knife with ivory handle.
10. The term "Canaanites" is here used for the indigenous population, as "Palestinians" cannot be used without ambiguity, see Lemche (1991) for the term.
11. Cf. 2. Sam. 22,19 stating that a certain Elkanan from Bethlehem was the real slayer of Goliath.
12. They should be compared with the inscription from Ekron mentioning "Ikausu, son of Padi"; see Gitin, Dothan and Naveh (1997) and above.
13. Cf. Dothan (1979); McGovern (1994); Pritchard (1980) 10-30; Strange (forthcoming a); Tubb (1988) 73-80; (1997) 453.

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